

Live and Learn

Don't just lie there on that chaise longue sipping that piña colada! Explore these resort-based classes and cultural offerings for an unforgettable getaway.

BY: MARYANN HAMMERS

FOR MANY, THE SOLE PURPOSE of a vacation is to kick back and relax—the biggest decision of the day being which drink to order. Still, there are those at the other extreme whose idea of travel is nonstop sightseeing.

Then there are those who fall somewhere in the middle. They want to be active, experience a destination's people and places, and take home memories of something more than frothy pink drinks by the pool.

If this sounds like you, keep reading. The following fine resorts—with their classes and cultural offerings ranging from releasing sea turtles into the wild, to photo and wildlife safaris, to wine tastings—provide just the right mix of leisure and learning. And after a day of discovery, a frothy pink drink awaits.

Sun, Sand and Sea Turtles

At the **Mauna Lani Bay Hotel** on Hawaii's Big Island, not only can you sunbathe on a white sand beach, relax in an open-air lava rock sauna and snorkel among more than 200 kinds of tropical fish; you can

also meet, greet and help sea turtles.

After checking in, make your first stop the resort's saltwater pond "nursery," where caretaker Pi'i Laeha feeds the baby turtles (called *honu*) that live there until they are ready to face the world on their own. Tip: Schedule your visit on or around July 4, when guests get to participate in the turtles' annual release.

Get Out There

Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa,
505.867.1234, www.tamaya.hyatt.com.

Mauna Lani Bay Hotel,
866.877.6982, www.maunalani.com.

Ojai Valley Inn & Spa,
888.697.8780 (800.422.6524 for class
information), www.ojairesort.com.

Treetops Lodge & Estate,
64.7.333.2066, www.treetops.co.nz.



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LEARN BY DOING: Guests of the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa keep their hands and minds busy by learning to bake bread in outdoor ovens.

And sea turtles are just the beginning here. Tour petroglyph fields and lava caves that sheltered ancient Hawaiians; walk the historic mountain-to-sea footpath; and join native Hawaiians at the “Twilight at Kalahuipua’a” full moon gathering for songs, hula dances and cultural tales.

Go Native

The approximately 800 members of the Santa Ana Pueblo own the Hyatt Regency Tamaya Resort & Spa, located between Santa Fe and Albuquerque. The “Tamayame,” as the pueblo members call themselves, have lived in this area since the early 1500’s—and they want to share their rich heritage and culture with you.

You are invited to watch tribal members dance in the courtyard and learn to bake Native American bread in *hornos* (outdoor ovens). You can also make pottery or adobe bricks with your bare hands; walk with a pueblo guide through the cottonwood *bosque* (forest); and go on trail rides. Come evening, you can cozy up to the fire for storytelling under the stars.

As you return to your room, haunting, lingering flute sounds fill the halls; and exquisite pottery, handcrafted baskets and

woven blankets are displayed at every turn. From your room, you have views of the *bosque*, the horse trails, the Rio Grande and the pink-tinged Sandia Mountains. It all conspires to remind you of where you are—and who was there first.

Rain Forest Adventures

With just eight private villas and four large suites on more than 2,500 acres and 49 miles of trails, seven streams and four waterfalls, Treetops Lodge & Estate offers unsurpassed privacy and outdoorsy experiences deep in an ancient New Zealand rain forest.

Guests are invited to embark on adventures such as bird-watching, horseback riding, photo and wildlife safaris, rock climbing, kayaking, sailing and mountain biking, as well as helicopter and four-wheeling tours. A native Maori guide is on hand to accompany you to identify the indigenous flora and fauna (including water buffaloes, wild pigs and peacocks). “Treetops is all about exploring nature in a conscious and mindful way,” says Andrea Schnoor, the resort’s spokeswoman.

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accommodations. The resort boasts marble and mahogany amenities, plus innovative touches such as an 1896 billiards table, a 20-foot indoor waterfall and a trout stream that runs through the building. Treetops has also just begun a vertical wine tasting package featuring rare New Zealand vintages from the 1960's through today, plus a five-course meal and an after-dinner Cognac. Go ahead—indulge. After all, you'll need to fuel up for tomorrow's outings.

Art and Soul

Ojai, a bucolic artists' haven north of Los Angeles, offers something not usually found in today's hustle-bustle world—the chance to catch your breath. Ancient oaks dot the landscape; citrus blossoms scent the air; and the rolling green Topa Topa Mountains form a lush backdrop against an impossibly blue sky.

Here you'll find the 80-year-old Spanish-style Ojai Valley Inn & Spa—a picturesque golf and spa retreat that offers an array of yoga and meditation classes, as well as artisan workshops. Try your hand at creating your own trance-inspiring Tibetan mandala; learning to distill lavender and other healing herbs; or blending essential oils in an aromatherapy class. To further soothe the soul, join a contemplative hike ending with quiet meditation; or walk the labyrinth.

The resort's new "Short Courses in Living Better" include sarong making using traditional batiks; and wreath weaving from freshly snipped herbs and flowers that grow in the resort's gardens.

"Our overall philosophy is to provide experiences that lead to discovery and adventure and will actually transform our guests' lives," says Rodger MacDonald, the resort's sales director. And that's what travel is all about, right? Now order that frothy pink drink and head to the pool. 



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